

Sermon for Sunday, October ²⁰~~15~~, 1974 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"YO YO RELIGION"
I Kings 18:1-21

Text: "And Elijah came near to all the people, and said, 'How long will you go limping with two different opinions?'" I Kings 18:21a

Let me begin this morning by giving you a bit of Old Testament history. The time was about 922 when Solomon, the son of David, passed away. Upon his death, trouble which had been brewing under his harsh policies suddenly erupted and the nation split north and south. The southern kingdom became known as Judah and the northern kingdom as Israel. In the northern kingdom there was political instability for a number of years until a man named Omri came to the throne around 876. Omri proved to be a capable and powerful ruler with considerable political savvy. Recognizing that he needed an outlet to the sea in order to stabilize his commerce, he moved at once to establish relations with Phoenicians who controlled the lands along the Mediterranean coast. As was common in these times, the treaty he worked out with the king of the city of Tyre included the marriage of his son Ahab to Jezebel, the king's daughter.

By 869 Ahab had come to the throne of his father and he moved at once to make his bride feel at home in the city of Samaria, the capitol of Israel. One of the first things he did was to build a temple to her native god, who in this case was Baal-Mekart. Jezebel was a fanatical evangelist for her god and she imported a great number of Baal priests and supported them out of the public treasury. As a matter of fact, she was so zealous for her religion that she began an aggressive campaign to root out the religion of Israel and destroy the Jewish priests. The Bible tells us that the altars of God were torn down, the prophets were killed, and the rest were driven underground. As all of this persecution was going on, a drouth paralyzed the country. Now, it was at this point that the prophet Elijah made his dramatic appearance on the scene. He challenges the priests of Jezebel to a religious contest on the slopes of Mount Carmel. This contest between the numerous Baal prophets and the solitary prophet of God is one of the most dramatic accounts in the Bible. As the Jews gather to watch the contest, Elijah accuses the people of "limping with two different opinions." In the Hebrew language, the charge against the people is even more vivid than the translation suggests. Actually, a better translation would be, "how long will you keep hopping from one leg to another?" Someone has suggested that the image pictured is like a bird that hops along a branch until it comes to a fork in the limb and then tries to keep going by putting one foot on one branch and the other foot on the other branch. Elijah said the people were like that. They wanted to keep one foot in the faith of Israel and the other foot in the religion of Baal. They had a yo yo religion. They were up and down in their commitment. They were back and forth in their allegiance. But now Israel had come to a fork in the road and Elijah put the issue squarely to them. If God is the Lord, then follow him. If Baal is the Lord, then follow him.

But that is always the decision that God confronts us with, isn't it? God makes a total claim on a man's loyalty. He wants a man to serve him with all of his heart, soul, and strength. God doesn't want a spiritual yo yo who never comes down at any one place. God wants a man who makes up his mind about who and what he is going to be, who commits himself.

And isn't this precisely the kind of trouble you and I have? We have trouble in making up our minds and keeping them made up as to who and what we will be. Some of you may remember reading last Christmas about the young man who lost his life

because he couldn't make up his mind. He had gotten a new motor bike for Christmas and it had gone dead on the railroad tracks. His efforts to get the machine started again failed and he looked up to see a fast passenger train bearing down on him. He had a choice to make; either to stay with his beautiful bike or leave it and get off the track himself. In his moment of indecision the fast-moving train smashed into him and his life was snuffed out. Because of his hesitation, his reluctance to give up something very dear and precious to him, he laid down his life before he could reconsider his decision. I suspect a lot of us are running that risk this morning. Disaster is bearing down on us but we can't make up our minds. We hate to leave the world we love so much. Our yo yo like indecision may prove our spiritual disaster.

The first observation I would like to make this morning is that spiritual indecision will cause us to betray the best in our lives. One of the books of the New Testament is a letter - really just a note - from St. Paul to a man named Philemon. As he closes the letter he mentions some of the men who are working with him and he writes, "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow worker." Yet, a little later, we come to the end of the second letter to Timothy and we find these words, "Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me.." (II Tim. 4:9-10) Demas was a man with yo yo religion. He wanted to serve the Lord but he loved the world, too. And in the end he betrayed the best in his life; he abandoned the Lord and St. Paul as well at a critical time. When the going got rough his indecision destroyed him and he betrayed the best. There will come a time in your life - as it does in the lives of us all - when the going gets rough when the temptations are hard, when the love of the world is great, and if there is spiritual indecision in our hearts at a time like that we will betray the best that is in us. I have a friend who is a doctor and he was an Elder in the Presbyterian Church. He worked hard and it took its emotional toll on him. He was so involved in his work and so anxious to make a lot of money that he began to miss church and to miss session meetings. Before long he had an affair with a nurse and as a result his marriage was destroyed. To my knowledge he no longer even attends church. Here was a man with one foot in the church and one in the world. When the going got rough and the temptation got hard, he betrayed the best in himself. You cannot have the best of all worlds. God wants a commitment from you. You have to make up your mind.

A second observation I would make is this: Spiritual indecision causes us to lose our inner peace. As a pastor I am acutely aware of the inner turmoil that characterizes the lives of so many of us today. By the same token, I have seen people who come to a decision, who make a commitment to Jesus Christ, and then they experience a wonderful, a tremendous, inner serenity. Judas was a man characterized by inner spiritual indecision. First, he betrayed his Lord into the hands of the enemies of Jesus. For his act he received thirty pieces of Silver. Yet, when the deed had been done, when he had already betrayed the best in his life, his indecision began to eat at him. As a consequence he lost his inner peace. He tried to go back and undo what he had done but as so often is the case we can't relive life and undo the damage we cause. With his inner peace simply destroyed, Judas could not face up to life and the Bible tells us that he went and hanged himself. I suspect there are a lot of us this morning who have lost our inner peace. Dare I suggest to us that it may very well be because we are not fully and totally committed? Our inner turmoil may be because we are spiritually hopping from one foot to the other, yo yo Christians.

A third observation I would make is that spiritual indecision causes us to get our priorities out of order. What are your priorities this morning? What goals and

objectives, what things, are your number one priorities this morning? You see, if you have not come down with both feet in the same place for Jesus, it is likely that your priorities are out of order. Do you remember the incident where two men came to Jesus who wanted to follow him? To one of them Jesus said, "follow me." But the Bible says he replied, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." The other man said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." (Luke 9:59ff) Now, surely both of these requests are reasonable. The dead deserve the honor and esteem of a proper funeral and the living deserve the courtesy of a fond farewell. Yet, it was to these same men that Jesus said, "Let the dead bury the dead." and, "no man having put his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." That is, you have your priorities out of order. You see, it wasn't that the things they mentioned were not important, but they put them ahead of their loyalty to Jesus.

A lot of us are guilty of that this morning. We are putting other things ahead of Jesus. We put our work, our family, our loyalties to other things ahead of Jesus. And it isn't that those things are not worthwhile. Yet, when we put them ahead of our loyalty to Jesus, our priorities are out of order. So I would ask you again this morning, what are your priorities? If you cannot say that Jesus is first in your life and serving him your number one priority, then there is some spiritual indecision in your life and you can be fairly sure that your personal priorities are out of order.

A fourth observation I would make is this: spiritual indecision feeds on itself. The man who puts off making a decision may end up never deciding. Do you remember the story in the book of Acts of the Roman governor named Felix? Once when St. Paul was taken prisoner he was brought before Felix and the Bible records, "And as he argued about justice and self-control and future judgement, Felix was alarmed and said, 'Go away for the present; when I have an opportunity I will summon you.'" Two years later we are told that Felix was removed as governor and someone else took his place. The Bible never mentions him again and as far as we know he never did find the opportunity he was looking for. His spiritual indecision fed on itself and by putting off making a decision about Jesus he ended up never deciding.

Many of us this morning are spiritually undecided. We are yo yo Christians, hopping from one foot to the other. It may be this morning that God is moving on your heart to come down with both feet for Jesus. Don't put that decision off. To put off a decision may mean that you will end up never deciding. And if you are not going to decide now, when will you decide?

Most of us know who Johnny Cash is. At one time he was one of the top entertainers in America. But Johnny Cash began to drink and use drugs and before long he found himself in prison. It seemed that a fine career had gone down the drain. But something happened to Johnny Cash. He describes it this way, "My wife and I had been going to a little church near here. We were like most people, we had both been converted when we were children, but we hadn't lived for God, and for many years we'd really been going through hell. We had given our bodies to the devil and I guess now that there was nothing left but the bones, we were ready to give them back to the Lord. So we went down to the altar one night and gave ourselves to Jesus Christ. Totally. And we really meant business then, and we still do now. Everything in my life points to Christ now; I've dedicated everything I've got to him." Johnny Cash is again at the top of the entertainment world but he is a man with a new life-style. He puts it this way, "I guess I've committed every sin

